

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Peter Zoehrer on Resisting Japan's State Led Persecution of FFWPU

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Peter Zoehrer, journalist and executive director of [FOREF Europe](#), delivering his speech on July 10, 2025 in a session on second-generation members of, and apostates from, new religious movements in Japan and elsewhere, during the 8th annual conference of the European Academy of Religion (EuARe) at the University of Vienna



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journalist but also as Executive Director of [FOREF Europe](#), a Vienna-based human rights NGO dedicated to defending Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) as a fundamental civil right.

University of Vienna conference: Speaking out before silence wins - An urgent plea for freedom of religion in Japan

A Dangerous Precedent: Japan's Assault on Religious Freedom and Its Global Fallout

First part of a speech by Peter Zoehrer, Journalist and Executive Director, FOREF Europe at the 8th annual conference of the European Academy of Religion (EuARe) at the University of Vienna. The speech was delivered on the 3rd day of the conference, on July 10, 2025, in a session on second-generation members of, and apostates from, new religious movements in Japan and elsewhere. The conference is a premier international forum for scholarly exchange on religion's role amid socio-cultural transformation. The European Academy of Religion is known as the major forum for academic research on religion and its relevance for society.

1. Introduction

Ladies and gentlemen, esteemed colleagues, and friends,

It is an honor to speak at the 8th Annual EuARe Conference here at the University of Vienna. I address you today not only as a

While other presentations in this session offer academic analyses, I speak from the vantage point of an activist and passionate advocate for religious liberty. My hope is that this non-academic perspective will add a dynamic and perhaps urgent dimension to our discussion.

What I share today is not merely a legal case - it is a global warning. Since the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in July 2022, the [Unification Church](#) - also known as the [Family Federation](#)

[for World Peace and Unification](#) (FFWPU) - has been subjected to an unprecedented, state-driven campaign of repression in Japan.

What is unfolding threatens to become a blueprint for suppressing religious freedom - not just in Asia, but across democratic societies worldwide.



Given exclusive access to major media platforms: Politically motivated leftwing lawyers from National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales (NNLASS), also known as Japan Federation of Bar Associations (Zenkoku Benren), here at press conference after the [dissolution verdict](#) against the Family Federation 25th March 2025. From left: Katsuomi Abe, Hiroshi Yamaguchi, Masaki Kito

2. The Abe Assassination and the "Court of Public Opinion"

The assassin, Tetsuya Yamagami, blamed the [Unification Church](#) for his mother's financial ruin due to past donations. Yet instead of treating this as a criminal act by a disturbed individual, the Japanese media orchestrated a nationwide moral panic - a textbook case of blaming the victim and exonerating the perpetrator.

In this narrative inversion, the [Church](#) [See editor's note] - itself the indirect target of political violence - was turned into the scapegoat.



International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

This move flagrantly violates Japan's commitments under international law - particularly Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which protects the right not only to believe, but to organize, teach, and practice religion.

Within two weeks of Abe's death, more than 700 articles and broadcasts vilified the [Church](#) [See editor's note] as a societal menace. ¹ The media narrative was dominated by anti-cult lawyers - many affiliated with the Japan Federation of Bar Associations - who were given exclusive access to major platforms.

What emerged was a "media firewall": a closed information loop in which alternative perspectives - including those of scholars, [Church](#) [See editor's note] members, or international legal experts - were systematically excluded.

Public opinion was manipulated. Emotional testimonies were treated as fact. In this emotionally charged environment, political action soon followed.

3. The Dissolution Order: Criminalizing Belief Without Crime

In October 2023, the Japanese government [filed a request](#) to dissolve the [Unification Church's](#) [See editor's note] legal status as a religious corporation. ²

This action was not based on any criminal conviction. No court has found the [Church](#) [See editor's note] guilty of illegal conduct. Instead, the dissolution relied on civil complaints, politicized hearings, and unverified allegations - not on judicial rulings.

Significantly, [UN Special Rapporteur Nazila Ghanee](#) publicly raised concerns about the case and offered to visit Japan to investigate potential FoRB violations. ³ To date, the Japanese government has failed to respond to her repeated requests.

What does Tokyo have to hide? If the process is fair and transparent, why ignore the UN's top human rights envoy?

4. Silencing the World: Ignoring Global Appeals



Sent formal UN request to Japan, but no reply: Nazila Ghanea, UN Rapporteur on Religious Freedom since February 2023

This is not just a domestic matter. Leading international scholars, FoRB experts, and respected political leaders have appealed to Japan to halt this dangerous course.

These include former UN officials, Members of the European Parliament, renowned constitutional scholars, former heads of state, and over 400 senior advisors from global civil society networks.

But their appeals - formal letters, legal analyses, public statements - have been met with deaf ears in Tokyo.

What we are witnessing is not simply denial - it is the defense of a national narrative that scapegoats a [minority religion](#) to deflect from institutional responsibility.

A democracy that silences international counsel and censors domestic dissent is not acting in the spirit of human rights.

To be continued. Part 2 coming soon.

Footnote 1: "Shinzo Abe's death leads to scrutiny of Unification Church," BBC, July 2022; CESNUR and Bitter Winter compilations.

Footnote 2: "Japan files court request to dissolve Unification Church," Kyodo News, October 2023.

Footnote 3: UN Special Rapporteur communication to Japan, OHCHR, February 2024. Visit offer and rejection confirmed by UN press office.

[**Editor's note:** Although Peter Zoehrer uses the word "church", please be aware that the [Unification Church](#) in Japan in 2015 changed its name to [Family Federation for World peace and Unification](#).]

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See also [“Organized Terrorism, Not Lone Wolf, Killed Abe”](#)



Dr. Jun Takada at the Senichi Club 25th June 2022. Photo: [Sekai Nippo](#)

With the third anniversary of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's (安倍晋三) assassination approaching, a [lecture](#) was held in Tokyo by Jun Takada (高田純), Professor Emeritus at Sapporo Medical University, calling for a full investigation into the truth of the incident. Professor Takada, through audio analysis of video footage taken before and after Abe was shot, revealed that a sound resembling a different gun was recorded between the two shots fired by suspect Tetsuya Yamagami (山上徹也) with his homemade firearm.

Takada reported these findings to then-Prime Minister Fumio Kishida (岸田文雄) but received no response. One must ask: is there something inconvenient about acknowledging a scientific analysis that cannot be dismissed as a mere “conspiracy theory”? Doesn't that in itself smell like a conspiracy?

Participating in the lecture as a commentator was Hiroyuki Uno (宇野博幸), a former police officer and expert in stop-and-search procedures, who also authored *Proactive Checkpoints and Stop-and-Search to Get Results* (Haruyoshi Publishing). Uno remarked,

“If we had recreated Yamagami's homemade gun and tested whether it actually had lethal capability, we'd know right away. But there's no indication such an experiment was ever done.”



The immediate aftermath of the assassination of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, in the vicinity of Kintetsu Yamato-Saidaiji station northern entrance on 8th July 2022. Photo: [Tokumeigakarinoashima / Wikimedia Commons](#). License: [CC ASA 4.0 Int](#). Cropped

Uno also expressed his frustration, saying,

“If the police had stopped and questioned Yamagami – who was acting suspiciously while carrying a shoulder bag – the incident could have been prevented.”

However, according to Uno, the police nowadays tend to be less proactive with stop-and-search than in the past.

Regarding the inadequate security arrangements, Uno noted,

“Even though Abe was a former prime minister, beefing up his security would quickly trigger complaints from leftists.”

It seems beyond doubt that the ones who lent a hand in Abe's assassination were the anti-Abe forces known as the ‘Abe-gā’ (chronic Abe-blamers).

See also [“Organized Terrorism, Not Lone Wolf, Killed Abe”](#)

Featured image above: Memorial of Shinzo Abe (安倍晋三) in Nara, Japan, the city where the assassination took place. Photo (2nd July 2023): [桂浜 / Wikimedia Commons](#). License: [CC ASA 4.0 Int](#)

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